

Greece

I. Summary

Greece is a "gateway" country in the transit of illicit drugs. Although not a major transit country for drugs headed for the United States, Greece is part of the traditional "Balkan Route" for drugs flowing from drug producing countries in the east to drug consuming countries in Western Europe. Greek authorities report that drug abuse and addiction continue to climb in Greece as the age for first-time drug use drops. Drug trafficking remains a significant issue for Greece in its battle against organized crime. Investigations initiated by the DEA and its Hellenic counterparts suggest that a dramatic rise has occurred in the number and size of drug trafficking organizations operating in Greece. The DEA and Hellenic Authorities conducted numerous counternarcotics investigations during the year, which resulted in significant arrests, narcotics seizures, and the dismantling of major drug trafficking organizations. A number of judges were charged and at least nine were dismissed for allegedly taking bribes in exchange for favorable judgments or early prison release of defendants, including accused drug traffickers. Greece is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention.

II. Status of Country

With an extensive coastline border, numerous islands, and land borders with other countries through which drugs are transported, Greece's geography has established it as a favored drug transshipment country on the route to Western Europe. Greece is also home to the world's largest merchant marine fleet. It is estimated that Greek firms own one out of every six cargo vessels and control 20-25 percent of cargo shipments worldwide. The utilization of cargo vessels is the cheapest, fastest and most secure method to transport multi-ton quantities of cocaine from South America to distribution centers in Europe and the United States. Greece is not a significant source country for illicit drug production, although marijuana cultivation operations have increased slightly. The marijuana that is produced in Greece is usually destined for the domestic market. Hellenic Authorities recently arrested an individual who was mailing anabolic steroids, which were later found to have originated in Russia, from Greece to the United States. (Use of anabolic steroids is legal in Greece. However, it is illegal to ship them to countries where they are categorized as a controlled substance.)

III. Country Actions Against Drugs in 2005

Policy Initiatives. Greece participates in the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative's (SECI) anticrime initiative, in the work of the regional Anti-Crime Center in Bucharest and in its specialized task force on counternarcotics. Enhanced cooperation among SECI member states has the potential to disrupt and eventually eliminate the ability of drug trafficking organizations to operate in the region.

Law Enforcement Efforts. Several notable joint U.S./Hellenic counternarcotics investigations occurred during 2005 with significant arrests and seizures. Following a two-year investigation, the DEA, in cooperation with Hellenic and Macedonian authorities, seized 6,500 kilograms of hashish and 1,088 kilograms of ephedrine in January 2005. The hashish and ephedrine were co-mingled in a containerized shipment of rice, which originated in Pakistan. The hashish was destined for North America, while the ephedrine was destined for Southeast Asia. In October 2005, the DEA and Hellenic Authorities dismantled a marijuana trafficking organization that was responsible for distributing metric ton quantities of marijuana throughout Greece for over a decade and was

growing marijuana in greenhouses in Central Greece. Hellenic Authorities executed search warrants on the greenhouses and several residences used by the organization, resulting in the arrest of six individuals and the seizure of 840 marijuana plants, 105 kilograms of processed marijuana, 21 kilograms of marijuana seeds, scales and packaging materials. According to Hellenic Authorities, this was the largest marijuana cultivation operation ever seized in Greece. The Hellenic National Police reported that through November 2005, 10,204 kilograms of hashish, 278 kilograms of heroin, and 39 kilograms of cocaine were seized by authorities, and 11,411 individuals were arrested in connection with the above seizures.

Narcotics seizures increased considerably in 2005. In November, authorities in the Western Macedonia region reported seizing three times the hashish seized in 2004. National seizures of heroine and cocaine were also reported to have increased over 2004 seizures. Police and customs authorities report a decline in drug trafficking on the Greece-Turkey border, attributed to more stringent enforcement, including vehicle X-rays on the Turkish side of the border. Nigerian drug organizations smuggle heroin and cocaine through the Athens airport, and increasingly through the Aegean islands from Turkey. A small portion of these drugs is smuggled into the United States.

Corruption. Officers and representatives of Greece's law enforcement agencies are generally under-trained, underpaid, under-appreciated, and overworked. Although this atmosphere has the potential to breed corruption, the level of corruption in the law enforcement agencies is relatively low with regard to narcotics and narcotics-related money laundering. Regarding the judiciary, at least nine judges were dismissed and as many as 50 judges are being prosecuted for allegedly taking bribes in exchange for favorable judgments or early prison release for a variety of defendants, including accused drug traffickers. As a matter of government policy, Greece neither encourages nor facilitates illicit production or distribution of narcotics, psychotropic drugs, or other controlled substances or the laundering of proceeds from illegal drug transactions. No known senior official of the GOG engages in, encourages, or facilitates the illicit production or distribution of such drugs or substances, or the laundering of proceeds from illegal drug transactions.

Agreements and Treaties. Greece is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention, the 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances, and the 1961 UN Single Convention as amended by its 1972 Protocol. An agreement between Greece and the United States to exchange information on narcotics trafficking has been in force since 1928, and an extradition treaty has been in force since 1932. A mutual legal assistance treaty and an extradition treaty between the U.S. and Greece are in force. The United States and Greece also have concluded a customs mutual assistance agreement (CMAA). The CMAA allows for the exchange of information, intelligence, and documents to assist in the prevention and investigation of customs offenses, including the identification and screening of containers that pose a terrorism risk. Greece has signed, but has not yet ratified, the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the UN Convention against Corruption.

Cultivation/Production. Cannabis, cultivated in small amounts for local consumption, is the only illicit drug produced in Greece.

Drug Flow/Transit. Greece is part of the "Balkan Route" and as such is a transshipment country for heroin refined in Turkey, hashish from the Middle East, and heroin and marijuana from Southwest Asia. Metric ton quantities of marijuana and smaller quantities of other drugs are smuggled across the borders from Albania, Bulgaria, and the Republic of Macedonia. Hashish is off-loaded in remote areas of the country and transported to Western Europe by boat or overland. Larger shipments are smuggled into Greece in shipping containers, on bonded Trans-International Route trucks, in automobiles, on trains, and in buses. A small portion of these drugs is smuggled into the United States, including Turkish-refined heroin that is traded for Latin American cocaine, but there is no evidence that significant amounts of narcotics are entering the United States from Greece.

Domestic Programs (Demand Reduction). Drug addiction continues to climb in Greece. According to the National Documentation Center for Narcotics and Addiction run by the Mental Health Research Institute of the Medical School of the University of Athens, 8.6 percent of the Greek population between 12 and 64 years of age report that they have used an illegal substance one or more times in their life. The most commonly used substances are chemical solvents, and marijuana and heroin. There has been a surge in the illegal use of tranquilizers and, to a lesser extent, ecstasy pills, that reflects developments in the growing European synthetic drug market. The GOG estimates that there are between 20,000 and 30,000 addicts in Greece of whom about 19,000 are addicted to heroin, with the addict population growing.

The Organization Against Narcotics (OKANA) is the state agency that coordinates all national treatment policy in Greece. It has the capacity to treat 3,923 persons in 40 therapeutic rehabilitation centers, of which 25 offer "drug free" programs, seven offer methadone substitution programs, and 8 offer buprenorphine substitution programs. The average number of addicts treated in 2004 was 2,783, and the total number of those who received therapeutic treatment was 5,160. OKANA has 64 prevention centers in 47 of the 52 regions in Greece, and treated 1,824 addicts in "drug free" therapeutic programs in 2004, down from 1,967 in 2003. About 3,000 persons have been registered in waiting lists for substitution programs. OKANA plans to extend its program to other regions and to open it to more addicts, but its plans are threatened by strong local reactions against the establishment of such treatment centers. In June 2005, the Mayor of Athens, in collaboration with the national broadcasting organization and the drug rehabilitation organization KETHEA, presented plans for a new rehabilitation/detoxification center to be opened in Athens.

IV. U.S. Policy Initiatives and Programs

Bilateral Cooperation. In 2005, an American Professor of Clinical Psychiatry and Director of the Center for Criminality & Addiction Research, Training & Application at UC San Diego was awarded a Fulbright scholarship to develop curricula and direct workforce development trainings for treatment of addiction.

The Road Ahead. The United States continues to encourage the GOG to participate actively in international organizations focused on narcotics assistance coordination efforts, such as the Dublin Group of narcotics assistance donor countries. The DEA will continue to organize regional and international conferences, seminars, and workshops with the goal of building regional cooperation and coordination in the effort against narcotics trafficking.